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SOURCE Il Lunedì del Medio Oriente.PERSECUTION OF CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ALBANIA

Confirmed reports on the persecution of the Catholic Church now going on in Albania paint a tragic picture of the circumstances in which Catholic priests and higher officials find themselves under Hoxha's Communist regime. Of the 253 Catholic churches and chapels existing in Albania in 1945, 65 percent have been destroyed. Moreover, both seminaries have been closed down and all of the ten monasteries and 20 convents have been destroyed or suppressed. The same fate has befallen the 15 asylums and orphanages operated by the Catholic Church, the 16 Catholic schools, and Catholic charitable institutions, as well as printing shops and serial publications.

Losses among the Catholic clergy have been even more appalling, according to the Bollettino Albanese di Informazioni (presumably the Rome organ of the National Committee for Free Albania). The following five bishops have been shot or have died in prison: Gasper Thaci, Shkoder; Vincenc Prennushi, Durres; Gjorgj Volaj, Sappa; Franco Ginja, Lesh; and Bernardino Shlaku, Pula. Of the 93 priests who were in Albania in 1945, only ten now remain. Of the other 83, 24 have been assassinated, 35 are in prison, 10 are dead or missing, 11 have been drafted for military service, and 3 have fled abroad. Most of those killed were held in prison and tortured for many months. Of the 92 friars of various monastic orders who were in Albania 10 years ago, 18 have been assassinated, 34 are in prison or engaged in forced labor, 17 have been expelled from Albania, 15 are still in Albania (presumably free), and 10 have not been heard from for many years.

Other reports indicate that the Albanian Communist regime is also persecuting the Moslem and Orthodox religions and their Albanian followers. Information on this is currently being collected by the National Committee for Free Albania.

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